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ESSENTIALS

JEFFERSON

Essentials

By DR. JEFFERSON

THINGS FUNDAMENTAL

A course of thirteen discourses in modern apologetics. In this volume the author treats, in his masterly way, those vital themes which often perplex thinking men.

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Essentials

An Address on the
Fundamentals of
Christian Faith
and Service

BY

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The Demand

THE subject is one which chimes in with the temper of our generation and fits into the needs of our times. The fact is, the whole world has gone in search of things fundamental. There is a passion for reality so hot that it is certain to get to the bottom. The consequence is that everything nowadays is pulled up by the roots and the roots are carefully examined; everything, no matter how ancient or how sacred, is tossed into the smelting pot and melted down and analyzed; everything is put into the witness-box and cross-questioned and compelled to

give a reason for its being. For instance, there are certain things so ancient and so sacred that everybody of a preceding generation would have said that those things were not to be discussed or questioned, but they are being questioned now.

The state, one of the oldest institutions of humanity, without which it was once supposed humanity could not exist—there are men alive who are asking seriously the question whether after all the state is fundamental. It has been the source of so many abuses, it has wrought such tragedies in history, that men are asking if, after all, government might not be wisely dispensed with. And these are not foul-mouthed, ignorant men that would deluge the earth with blood. They are in many cases elegant, refined, educated gentlemen, who are known as philosophical anarchists.

There are men who would go even further. They question the right of the family to exist. The family is the oldest of all the institutions, and it has always been supposed up to our own day and generation that it was one of the fundamental things upon which civilization must forever rest. But now there are earnest, educated men, who write with a style that has in it the marks of genius, and they would make out that the family is a plague spot of ruin, a fountain from which evil springs, and that humanity would be better if the home could be abolished.

Now, if that be the temper of our age it is not at all surprising that there should be men who ask us whether the church after all is essential. It is not surprising that the Bible should be investigated, torn to pieces, examined bit by bit. It is

only what we ought to expect. It is not surprising that the creed should be thrown into the crucible and melted down and resolved into its constituent elements. It is not surprising that the sacraments should be scrutinized and that men should ask, After all, does humanity need the religion of Jesus of Nazareth?

It is not my purpose to go into the political or domestic realm. We shall confine ourselves strictly to the realm of religion. Let us look at some of the reasons why men are eager to get to the foundation facts of the religion of Jesus.

Christianity is a very large term. The religion founded by Jesus Christ has had nineteen hundred years of history. It is not to be wondered at that in the course of the nineteen hundred years it should have developed and should have gathered around

itself a great mass of traditions, and, being constituted as it is in its present organized form, it is only natural that men should be asking, What is the thing that is fundamental in it?

You who have had experience in rolling snowballs know this: that the longer you roll a snowball the bigger it gets; and you know that it picks up not only snowflakes, but it picks up stones and sticks and dead leaves. Christianity, in rolling down the fields of these nineteen hundred years, has picked up a great many things, and men are asking nowadays which are the stones and which are the sticks and which are the dead leaves, and which are the white crystals from heaven. It is legitimate that they should ask just that question.

The Christian church may be compared to a river. Like all rivers, it must take in the discolorations and

sediments from every land thorugh which it flows. We are living in an age when men are asking, Which is the river of life, and which is the mud? It is a legitimate question.

The Christian church is an organism, and, like all organisms, it grows. It has undergone a process of development. But biologists acquaint us with the fact that not all developments are normal. There is such a thing as retrogression; there is such a thing as degeneration; there are such things as fungoid growths. And the question is, How much in this development of the Christian religion is according to the will of God, and how much of it is due to the vices and prejudices or passions of men? It is a legitimate question.

The Christian church may be compared to a temple upon which thousands of men have been working

through centuries. An inspired Apostle has reminded us that it is possible to build of hay and of wood and stubble as well as of gold and silver and precious stones. The time has come when men are asking, Which is the gold and which is the hay, and which is the silver, and which is the stubble? It is only right that they should ask it.

That is the sort of age we are living in, and we ought not to quarrel with the age because it is in this mood. The religious leader always makes a mistake who quarrels with his time. The time is here with a peculiar temper, and the age in which we live is to be instructed and helped by us. We can help it best only by coming into close sympathy with its disposition and ruling aspirations.

So let us, then, start out with that undoubted fact, that we are living in

an age that is full of confusion. The air is filled with dust, and it is also filled with steam, and steam and dust together make mud. The air which men are breathing nowadays is muddy. To escape from these confusions men are going back to the beginnings. In the eighteenth century, in order to escape the eighteenth-century infidelity, men said: "Let us go back to Calvin and Luther." And men went back, but they were not satisfied. The nineteenth century came and men said: "Let us go back to the Fathers." John Henry Newman said that, and Pusey and the rest of the Tractarian leaders. And they went back, but the world was not satisfied. Then men said: "Let us go back to the Apostles," and later on there rang out the cry: "Back to Christ!" That is the cry that is now ringing in our ears. It all comes out of this desire

to come face to face with things that are fundamental.

But for the present we are living in an age that is much confused. You cannot have a printing press rolling out magazines and papers and books by the thousands and tens of thousands, every man with the privilege of uttering his opinion, every man giving his interpretation and his idea—you cannot live in an age like that and have anything else but confusion. The result is that many men are agnostics. They do not fight Christianity as they fought it in the eighteenth century—as Voltaire and his co-workers fought it. They say simply, We do not know. And a great many men have pushed beyond the agnostic position, and, instead of saying, We do not know, say nothing at all. They have not thought about it seriously enough to say, We do not know;

they give it no attention whatever. And that is why so much of the thought to-day is chaotic and confused and nebulous. The reason that Voltaire kicked Christianity was because Christianity was a compact and concrete thing that he could see, and he kicked it. But nowadays Christianity to the minds of many men is simply a bunch of fog, a swirl of mist, and no man in his senses will kick at a mist.

One reason why so many men in our generation are absolutely indifferent is because Christianity has taken on such multiform shapes, it has come before the attention in such a variety of forms, that a man is all confused and gives it no earnest study whatever. And now, because this is the condition of our age, you see how tremendously important it is that all religious leaders should have clean-

cut ideas. If the blind lead the blind they will all tumble into the ditch. If the befogged lead the befogged they will all come out at last in a fog bank. If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who is going to prepare for battle? And so the first thing the religious leader of to-day must do is to see clearly the foundation stones upon which his feet must rest and upon which his house must be erected.

The Need

I WISH to call attention to three fundamentals. My first fundamental is: The fundamental *need*. It is very important that every religious leader should know what is the fundamental need of humanity; what is the fundamental need of the twentieth century. If you listen to the noises that come sounding through the streets, there are a thousand answers to the question, What is the need of the twentieth century; what is the need of America to-day? It is hardly necessary to run back over the centuries and consider the answers that have been given.

A long while ago the answer was, "Force, coercion, is what the world needs. Humanity will prosper if you make the government strong enough to compel men to obey the law and walk along the lines that are just and wise." That was the idea of the Roman Empire, and it counted itself eternal. But force cannot settle anything. That is why the Roman Empire was allowed to die, to demonstrate once for all that force in God's world is not the solution. Russia in our own day has tried it, but Russia seems to be on the point of disintegration, demonstrating once more the incontrovertible fact that force in God's universe can do nothing.

After Rome fell men began to dream that liberty was what the world most of all needed. In God's own good time it was permitted to the American people to try that great

remedy. For centuries men had prayed for freedom. Their prayer was answered. There was one flag flying that spoke to men's hearts of liberty. And yet is the problem of America solved? We are to-day face to face with it. Liberty by itself solves nothing. That is the colossal fact demonstrated by one hundred years of national history. Liberty by itself does little. Take, for instance, our negro problem. Isn't it greater now than it was at the close of the Civil War? The shackles of slavery are broken, but the negro problem is more difficult, more complex, more puzzling than ever. The negroes are free, but you cannot solve anything by liberty.

Later on men began to think that possibly education was the thing that men most needed, and that if, along with liberty, the common people

could have the advantage of public schools, then certainly the golden age would come. And so above all the peoples of the earth we have built school-houses and colleges and universities. Millions of dollars have been piled up in our educational institutions; and now we are coming face to face with this awful fact, that among the most dangerous men in America are men who have come out of our high schools and universities. Judge Holt was perfectly right when, in one of the cases against a great railroad corporation, he scored the men that stood convicted before him, saying that he regarded their crime far more heinous than the ordinary crimes that come under the cognizance of the Court, because these crimes committed by officials of great railroad corporations of this country are committed by men of high education

and lofty standing, and the crimes that they commit are not committed in the heat of passion or by way of sudden temptation, but in cold blood and by long-matured deliberation. Education will not solve anything.

But somebody says: "Applied science is what we want. If we could apply the forces which the scientist discovers, then certainly the problem would be solved." And so we have been trying to apply science. Educated men in Russia are applying science. They know how to make bombs that will explode. That is applied science. But the finest illustration of applied science is a battleship. It is a wonder. It is a marvel of skill. Science has exhausted her resources in the creation of this costly implement of slaughter. The machinery is superb, the guns are miracles of workmanship, the shells are the ripe

fruit of years of study and experiment. Science has done her best—to destroy life and make vengeance more horrible and deadly. Applied science will never solve the world's problems. It has not touched East London or wide districts of lower New York.

It is because the old remedies fail to cure that men to-day are dreaming of socialism. And socialism, if I am a prophet, is the great movement of the twentieth century. Every man who intends to be a religious leader ought to begin at once to study it and to understand its fundamental assumptions. Now the fundamental contention of scientific socialism as enunciated by Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle is that man is the product of his circumstances. "Every man is made by his environment, every man is what he is because of the food he eats, the clothes he wears, the house

he lives in, the work he does. These are the controlling and the determining factors of human life." Such is the teaching of socialism.

The leaders of socialism have come to recognize the futility of all these things that I have been mentioning, liberty and education and applied science, and they have said and are saying now: "You cannot do anything worth while, you cannot make substantial progress, you cannot end the awful tragedies, unless you change the base of civilization. Will you account for any civilization, then study the economic system. The economic system gives form and temper to a country's civilization. Will you account for the civilization of the age of Pericles? Study the economic system of his time. Will you account for the civilization of the middle ages? Study the system of feudalism. Will

you understand all the woes and tragedies of the world to-day? They all flow out of our economic system. Change your economic system and you pave the way for the golden age." That is the teaching of socialism. What are we going to say? Every man who is a Christian leader must have an answer to that, because these are men that burn with fervent heat. They have in them much of the enthusiasm that burned in the veins of Paul and John and James; they are willing to sacrifice themselves, as few men in the world nowadays are willing to sacrifice themselves, in order to make new converts and push their principles over wide areas of human life. And what is our answer?

I believe that the fundamental need of humanity to-day is precisely what it has always been. The fundamental need is new men. Unless a religious

leader sees that, he will never be able to stand up and hold his own against the socialist. We must not fight socialism because it insists upon changed conditions, for conditions ought to be changed. Nor can we afford to stand up and resist men who say that we must have freedom and education and applied science. Of course we must have these. But what is fundamental, what is at the base, what is the thing upon which everything must be built? It is the new man! That is the fundamental need. I will subscribe to all these other needs, but they are all secondary. Give me the thing that is fundamental, and in time all these other things will come; but if you refuse to give me the thing that is fundamental, then we shall forever build upon the sand. Socialism builds upon the sand because it does not see that any civilization that endures must

found itself upon hearts that have been renewed. Of course it is an old truth. Thomas Carlyle expressed it in his good old Scotch way when he said: "Get your man and all is got." That is exactly what St. Paul said in another way: "The whole creation groans and travails together in pain until now," * * * "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."

The Problem

WE have seen the fundamental need. Now we are ready for the fundamental *problem*. There are a thousand problems just as there are a thousand needs. I do not wonder that men grow confused. Just think of it. I was trying one day to make out a list and I hadn't paper enough. It is marvelous how complex society has grown to be and how multitudinous the problems are. For instance, problems of transportation. Transportation in this country is one of the colossal problems. How to get wheat from the West to the East. That

itself is a hard problem. How to get human beings from one city to another without having them mangled or burned up. That is a great problem. But that is only one of the smaller problems. Come to the industrial problem, the problem between capital and labor. Take the economic problems, such as the problem of the tariff. Or take the race problem,—the negro problem, the Japanese problem, the Chinese problem; and, if you choose, then come into a broader realm and consider the international problem, the problems that have come upon us because of the Philippines and because of the closer relationship in which all of the nations of the world to-day are standing. They cannot be counted.

But now, What is the fundamental problem? Everything depends upon clear sight at this point: What is

the problem? Have you answered it in your own hearts? What is the problem to which you have set yourselves in all your Christian work? To my mind there is just one answer. There is only one problem that is fundamental and that is the problem of sin. All the other problems are rooted in that. I never would be so foolish as to deny that these other problems are important. Of course they are, tremendously important, and all I claim is that the sin problem is fundamental; and I know that it is, because to this problem Jesus devoted Himself throughout His public career. There were other problems in His day, problems of the state and problems of society and problems of the church, but He did not give Himself to any of them. Many men have misunderstood Him because He turned His back upon

them all. They do not appreciate the fact that He saw so clearly the problem that is fundamental.

He might have talked with great eloquence and power against Cæsar. Cæsar is always a more interesting subject than sin. But Jesus never talked about Cæsar. He talked about the heart that was estranged from the loving Father. To that He gave all His attention. There were many things to discuss in Jerusalem, because society was badly tangled then, and all sorts of complications had arisen, but He turned His back upon them all and endeavored simply to do this one thing—to bring human hearts into sympathy with the Eternal Father. That was the problem ; and if you will take His parables, one after another, you will find that they do not deal with the problem of transportation or political

economy or social readjustments, but they deal with problems of the will —the will estranged from God, and how to bring the will into harmony with the will that is Eternal. That was the problem that Jesus Christ saw, and you cannot understand the New Testament until that becomes clear.

Paul, the greatest preacher that has ever lived, saw just what Jesus saw: that sin is the problem to which the Christian teacher and preacher must give himself. Christ was always saying: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished." Other men may wander here and there: the religious leader must see the things that are fundamental. The man that deals with sin and cleanses a human soul plants an acorn that will become an oak. The man that deals with sin

lights a fuse that will cause an explosion some time. There are men that fuss and fume and storm and dabble on the surface and seem to be doing tremendous things. They do but little. A man who deals with sin is dealing with life at its foundation. Therefore, he who would be a successful Christian leader must always keep close to that fundamental problem, the problem of sin.

The problem is not the development of a man's muscles, although that is tremendously important. The fundamental problem is not the problem of the sort of a bath that is most conducive to a man's health, although that is tremendously important. The problem is not at what trade a man shall work, although that is tremendously important. The fundamental problem is, How can the human will be brought into harmony

with the will of God? and if you miss that you miss it all. Therefore, let no religious leader ever grow weary in talking about these two things: the penalty of transgression and the possibility of forgiveness.

Oh! the young men in America who are burning themselves up! What a chance to tell them the truth! There are thousands and tens of thousands of young men burning up the substance of the blood out of which all good things must come; writing checks, hundreds of checks, that will come back after these men have passed their fiftieth birthday, and cannot be paid. For thousands of men the last end of life is a long drawn and pitiable tragedy. That ought to be said. You are dealing with something that is fundamental when you call attention to the awful retribution that follows the

abuse of freedom. But along with that is another thing that is fundamental, and it comes also from the lips of Christ, the possibility of forgiveness. A man may have fallen a thousand times, but he can get up. He may have wandered into a very far country, but he can come back. He may have committed what he conceives to be unpardonable sin, but with the Father there is plenteous redemption and he may live again. That is fundamental.

The Solution

NOW let us pass on to the third of the things fundamental—the *solution*. We have thought about the fundamental need. We have thought about the fundamental problem. Now let us think about the fundamental solution, the fundamental remedy. You know my answer. It is no new thing that I am telling you—Jesus. The fundamental solution is Jesus. Would you have your new man? Then look to Jesus. Would you solve the problem of sin? Look to Jesus.

I do not think there is any reason to imagine that among thoughtful

men there would be any difference of judgment or any haziness of opinion in regard to this, because any man who reads the New Testament can see that its sublime declaration is: God is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" And you know the answer: "There is a variety of opinions, but men all agree that you are a wonderful man; you resemble different great men that we have had, Isaiah and Jeremiah and John the Baptist; men are not agreed as to the exact character that you most resemble, but they know that you are a wonderful man." And Christ turned away from the answer with sad eyes and a heart that was hungry. "Who do you say that I am?" The answer came back: "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." And then there was a joy in the eyes

of the Master and a gladness in His voice the disciples had never heard before as He said: "Thou art indeed Rock, and upon this rock I will build my church." He had never spoken of the church before. He never could have spoken of it until He found a man who knew who He was. And there you come to the thing that is fundamental: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock—" the Roman Catholics say that the rock is Peter, that the church is built on the man Peter. The reformers said: "Not so, it is not built on Peter, it is built on the doctrine of the Son of God." But we in our day have come to a better answer. We say: "The church is not built on Peter, it is not built on doctrine; it is built on the man held by truth, it is built on the truth vitalized by the man." Put the two together, the Roman Catho-

lic conception of the importance of Peter and the Protestant conception of the importance of truth, and you have something which is indeed fundamental,—a man burning with the conviction that Jesus Christ is indeed the redeemer of the world.

When we come to St. Paul we find that he has only one great message, he has only one thing that he desires for himself and only one thing that he desires for other men: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." He says that, you know, when he is in prison. He is an old man now, he has had time to think it over. This is his conclusion of the whole matter: "There is just one thing that I desire to know, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suf-

ferings." And what is his great desire for other men? You will find it in the greatest of his letters—the letter to the Ephesians, written to men who understood the gospel the most clearly of any men to whom he ever wrote, because he had given them three years of his life; and what is his last word for them? "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." That is the highest thing he can wish for those who are dearest to him.

Jesus, then, is the fundamental. "Moses said this, and other great men of the past said that, but I say unto you he that does these sayings of mine builds upon the rock. And the man who does not do the things that I say, that man builds

upon the sand." There is no doubt we have come now to that which is fundamental. Upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God, all our Christianity rests. Unless a man can stand on that rock with both his feet and without any tremor or doubt he will never be a man of power. That is fundamental. Our Lord Himself has said it in twenty different ways. "Are you hungry? I am the bread. Are you thirsty? I am the water. Have you lost your way? I am the way. Are you sick? I am the great physician. Is it dark? I am the light. Are you puzzled by doctrine? I am the truth." Isn't it clear? It would seem as though the whole of the New Testament were written to make it clear, that Jesus Christ is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the sum, the all. He is the rock of our salvation.

The Truth

AND now in conclusion I want to speak about an impression which one meets in many quarters. There is a widespread impression that the Christian religion is not now what it was a few years ago, and that it will be quite different still a few years ahead of us. When I was in college I was convinced that the church was decadent, and that much of her teaching was destined speedily to pass away. This feeling is very common among young men just starting out in life. The last fifty years have been eventful years. Never has there been such a transfor-

mation in the thoughts of men as has come to pass within the last half century. If ever the teachings of the church are going to pass away they will never find a better chance than they have found within the last generation. But it is amazing how little has in this recent tempest passed away. When I think of all the hubbub and outcry which we have had for lo! these many years, it is astounding to discover that the things which are fundamental all remain.

Take for instance the Bible. Many supposed that would pass entirely. Others supposed large parts of it would pass. Isn't it strange that after all these years of merciless analysis and investigation and criticism the old Book is just what it was when the oldest of us was in his cradle? How many books are there in it? Sixty-six. How many books were in it?

Sixty-six—thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New. I thought they revised it. So they did. What did the revisers do? How many books did they cut out? Not one. The greatest scholars of Great Britain, the greatest scholars in America, put their heads together and ransacked the libraries of the world and collated all the manuscripts and spent years in studying to find out if these writings really had a rightful place in the text of the Book of the Christian church, and what did they do? In the New Testament they put spaces around one paragraph in the Gospel of Mark, and brackets around another in the Gospel of John, and changed a word here and there through various chapters of various books. That is all they did. They did not venture even to take those two paragraphs out, because those paragraphs have

good authority upon which to rest, but they put brackets around them because they did not happen to be found in all of the most ancient manuscripts, and therefore as honest men these scholars were bound to let us know all the facts just as they had been found to be. But there are sixty-six books in the Bible, and the Bible lies on every pulpit throughout the Christian world, and preachers preach to-day as they did fifty years ago, taking their texts out of that old Book. I should call that Book, therefore,—something fundamental. We are living in an age of books. It is a question where they are going to stack them. They multiply every year, but no matter how many may be written I believe the Bible will be forever fundamental, and that out of it will continue to come in all the ages that are to be, streams

that make glad the hearts of men.

Well, what has passed away, then, about the Bible? Certain opinions that men had about it. Those were not fundamental. Opinions about its origin. Many of them have passed away. Those were not fundamental. Opinions about inspiration. They have been greatly modified in the last fifty years. But they were not fundamental. Opinions about the authorship of the Psalms. They were not fundamental. Nothing is fundamental about the Bible except the book itself; and our opinions, and all the learned treatises that are being written now by German and English and Scotch critics will pass away because they are not fundamental; but the old fundamental book will abide.

How about the creeds? I know the creeds are everywhere spoken against, and many men have a flippant

way of talking about them as though they really belonged to a bygone age. Let us begin with the Apostles' Creed. Take just a sentence or two. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Has any Christian ceased to say that? Don't you think that is a good thing to say? They were saying that when I was a baby, and they will say it when you and I are in our graves. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." And what is the difference between that as we say it and the same sentence as it was said in the century in which the creed was framed? When that was phrased men thought that our little earth was the center of the universe and that this great blue dome that is above us was very small and that the stars were shining points fastened to the blue. And science

has come along and put our earth where it belongs, and has put the sun at the center and has lifted the veil of blue and multiplied the constellations and taken us deeper and deeper into space and showed us suns and systems and universes of which the ablest scholars of ancient times had never dreamed; and you and I are permitted to go on saying, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"—our heaven as we know it and our earth as we know it. Science, instead of taking away our belief, is simply a handmaid of the Lord and has poured richer meanings into the old words so that we can repeat them with a new fervor and a fresh rapture.

If I had space I would take that whole Apostles' Creed, one verse after another, and show you that nothing has passed away. "I believe

in Jesus Christ, our Lord." Of course we do, and the latest generation of men will say just that. "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Who says that has passed away? "I believe in the holy catholic"—that is the holy universal—"church, the communion of saints." That is still so and all men will say that to the end of time. "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." Of course we do. "I believe in the resurrection of the body"—the standing up of the complete personality, the spirit clothed with a body. We all believe in that, and the last generation of men will believe it. "I believe in life everlasting." We all believe that.

And now a word concerning the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Which one of those would you do away with? Which has been done away with? Think of the water,

a symbol of the fact that God is willing to wash us of all sin. Think of the Lord's Supper, a symbol of the fact that God feeds us when we come to Him. Will we ever grow weary of the two fundamental truths that He washes away the stains of sin and feeds the hunger of the soul? The last generation of men that build their homes on this earth will be baptised into the name of Jesus Christ, and will take the bread in remembrance of the fact that He died for them.

Therefore, I say it is altogether false to suppose that anything fundamental has passed away. Opinions have passed, philosophies have passed, interpretations have passed; but all the great things—the things upon which our fathers built, the things that made them men—are still vital on the tongues of preachers and still

burn in the hearts of Christians everywhere, and forever and forever it will still be true no matter what men may think or say or do, that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.